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Date September 28, 2021 **Report No.** 2021-433

To Mayor and Members of City Council

From Heidi de Vries
General Manager, People, Legislated Services and Planning

1.0 Type of Report

Consent Item ☐
Item For Consideration ☒

2.0 Topic Council and its Committees Meeting Operations
[Financial Impact: \$10,000 Meal Budget Savings,
\$5,400 one-time Technology Expense and \$28,350
Operating Expenses for Facilities and IT Services]

3.0 Recommendation

- A. THAT report 2021-433 titled Council and its Committees Meeting Operations BE RECEIVED; and
- B. THAT staff BE DIRECTED to transition to a Council and its Committee Hybrid Operation Commencement – Phased Approach – Option One as outlined in report 2021-433, effective November City Council, and present an interim report direct to Council prior to the launch of Phase Two; and
- C. THAT staff BE DIRECTED to execute the live broadcasting of open session meetings with the following conditions:
 - i. Meetings to be broadcasted Live and Maintained on the City's Website / YouTube are City Council, Committee of the Whole's, Standing Committees – Finance, HR, Social Services;
 - ii. Meetings to be recorded but not broadcasted live are Task Forces, Advisory Committees;

- iii. Meetings not recorded, broadcasted or uploaded to YouTube / Website are Quasi-Judicial and Hearing type meetings, not including Planning Hearings as part of the Committee of the Whole or Council meetings; and
- D. THAT staff BE DIRECTED to proceed with the necessary encoder purchase of \$5,400 and include the operating impact of \$25,350 as an unavoidable increase in the 2022 budget and ensure all recorded open session meetings are processed via the encoder and maintained on the City's Website for one year after meeting date; and
- E. THAT staff BE DIRECTED to suspend meals for meetings and reevaluate for meetings commencing in 2023; and
- F. THAT the By-Law to enact the attached Corporate – 050 – Electronic / Virtual Meeting Operation Procedures Policy BE PRESENTED to Council for consideration and a review of the Policy to be conducted by Q3 2022.

4.0 Executive Summary

Since April of 2020, Council and its Committees have been operating in a virtual format. In preparation for the next phase of official Council and its Committees meeting operation which looks to leverage the electronic participation progresses made, a hybrid of both virtual and in-person meeting operation is recommended to be committed to.

The following represents the phased approach for the introduction of a hybrid meeting operation model:

PHASE	DESCRIPTION
Preliminary Work Phase	Planning, resource procurement, and testing of production equipment. This phase will also include mock meeting training for staff and Council Members and preparation of material for members of the public identifying in-person attendance at a hybrid meeting.
Phase One	First phase of Brantford's hybrid operation to include open session meetings of Council, Committee of the Wholes and Standing Committees.
First hybrid meeting to be November 23 rd City Council.	Phase one to be maintained while indoor capacity limits are restricted and masking requirements are in place.

	All Task Forces, Advisory Committees, and Special City Council meetings organized with the potential for an in-camera session will remain virtual.
Phase Two	<p>Second phase to facilitate the expansion of hybrid meeting operations, after indoor capacity limits are increased and/or the ability to execute an expanded model is viable.</p> <p>Prior to commencing Phase Two, an interim report would be provided to Council identifying the Phase Two activation plan.</p>

The report further outlines the necessary decisions and coordination efforts needed in order to move forward. Staff are recommending the creation of an Electronic / Virtual Meeting Operation Procedures Policy which will solidify the practices and governing guidelines to be used for meetings where an electronic participation, fully or partial, are being executed.

5.0 Purpose and Overview

To provide Council with a virtual meeting overview and an execution plan for a hybrid style meeting approach for City Council and its Committees.

6.0 Background

Council, at its meeting held May 25 2021, adopted the following as it relates to meeting operations:

14.1 CAO COVID-19 Emergency Update 05.25.21 [Financial Impact: NONE], 2021-407

THAT staff BE DIRECTED to prepare to maintain virtual Council operations until January 1, 2022 but continue to monitor regulations and health statistics relating to the COVID-19 pandemic and to present a report for Council's consideration on alternative meeting operations, including a return to in person meetings, which report shall proceed directly to Council no later than September 2021.

7.0 Corporate Policy Context

This report is consistent with Corporate-037 Community Involvement Policy which recognizes the value of community participation in the democratic process, incorporating a diverse pool of people, voices, ideas and information to lay the groundwork for quality outcomes and democratic legitimacy.

The report also impacts the KPMG Service Delivery Report Deliverable:

Leverage Existing Technology – (CityNet, eForms, eScribe, City Website) to increase efficiencies, increase online customer service, provide resources internally and externally.

8.0 Input From Other Sources

8.1 Internal Departments

The following were consulted in preparation of this report:

1. Communications Department
2. Executive Leadership Team (ELT)
3. Emergency Operations Centre (EOC)
4. Facilities Department
5. Human Resources Department – Health and Safety
6. IT Services Department
7. Legal and Real Estate Services Department

8.2 Public Consultation Campaign Results

The “Let’s Talk about public meetings after COVID-19 Campaign” ran from August 4 – September 7th, 2021 on the Let’s Talk Brantford (LTB) engagement platform. The campaign was supported by digital and print advertising in The Brantford Expositor and boosted social media posts on the City’s social media platforms. Outreach to complete the online survey on LTB was also conducted whereby Clerks staff engaged both Members of Council as well as 121 registrants who took part in Council meetings and 78 Committee members virtually in 2020 and 2021.

Opportunities to engage on the LTB project page included both an Online Survey and the Questions tool. Two-hundred and twenty (220) users visited the LTB project page and thirty-seven (37) respondents completed the online survey. One (1) user asked a question using the Questions tool. Comparatively,

this level of participation is well below the average number of participants who have engaged in previous campaigns on the LTB platform in 2021.

8.2.1 Quantitative Results Summary

Of the respondents who completed the survey, 43.2% expressed the opinion that City Council and Committee meetings in the future should be exclusively in person, whereby 48.8% preferred the option of hybrid meetings (a mix of in person and virtually). 5.4% selected the virtual only option (online and by phone) and 2.7% had no preference.

With respect to quasi-judicial and statutory public hearings, 51.4% of respondents favoured a hybrid approach whereas 35.1% preferred an in-person option and 13.5% selected the virtual option. 43.2% of respondents felt that if public meetings are facilitated using a hybrid approach, agents, applicants and owners should attend in person, while 48.6% of respondents said a hybrid or in person option should be available and 8.1% had no opinion.

With respect to Task Forces and Advisory Committees, 54.1% of respondents favoured a hybrid approach whereas 32.4% preferred an in-person option and 13.5% selected the virtual option.

With respect to who should be able to attend meetings in person or virtually, a significant majority of respondents expressed that all participants should have the option to participate in person or virtually.

In terms of a preferred option for speaking at a public meeting (if deemed safe to do so) respondents were split with 48.6% preferring to speak in person, while 43.2% preferred the option to have the choice to attend virtually or in-person.

8.2.2 Qualitative Results Summary

The open field questions of the survey asked respondents to provide commentary on their experiences participating in City meetings virtually as well as preferences with respect to how future meetings are broadcasted publicly. A majority of respondents indicated that they had a positive experience participating in a City meeting virtually. A minority of respondents cited concerns related to large number of participants of an Advisory Committee or Task Force on screen at the same time virtually being distracting.

With respect to meetings of Council being broadcasted, 90% of respondents expressed that in the interest of transparency, all meetings of Council, Advisory Committees and Task Forces should be made publicly available.

8.3 Comparator Municipalities

The following chart outlines a sampling of other municipalities' operation models:

Municipality	Operation
Barrie	Commencing September 13 th , a hybrid meeting approach where the Mayor, the 6 members of the executive management team, one information technology staff, and the City Clerk in Chambers. Participation by the public and staff will be through Zoom.
Brant	Current meeting operation is virtual format.
Burlington	Scheduled virtual meetings until December 2021. Projected transition/implementation goal of Q4 2021. According to the timeline on the report the proposed first Hybrid meeting is October 19, 2021
Cambridge	Scheduled virtual meetings until December 2021

Guelph	Scheduled virtual meetings until December 2021 and foreseeable future. Planning to review in 2022.
Grey Highlands	Operating in a Hybrid with no members of the public in attendance and majority of staff off-site.
Hamilton	Scheduled virtual meetings until December 2021 <i>Currently planning for hybrid return post-pandemic.</i>
Kitchener	Fully virtual meetings for the foreseeable future. No forecasted end date. <i>Post-pandemic planning being undertaken for hybrid (2023).</i>
London	Hybrid meeting approach, using Council chambers technology alongside zoom. Public participation at meetings have also been hybrid with some public in-person and participating via video conferencing in a committee room, and others participating via zoom. Unlike Council and Standing Committees, Advisory Committees have been purely virtual participation.
Oakville	Scheduled virtual meetings until December 2021. Commencing a review into hybrid meetings and preparing a report for Council consideration.
Waterloo	Scheduled virtual meetings until December 2021 and will be virtual for the time-being. <i>Clerk delegated authority to decide operation type.</i>

9.0 Analysis

9.1 Current Operations

9.1.1 Virtual Operation Experience

General Overview

Council and its Committee operations have been operating in virtual format since April of 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic. During

the time of a pandemic the virtual meeting format has provided for greater health and safety measures for Council, the public and members of Staff as a safer alternative to in-person and a hybrid of in-person and virtual. Members of Council, committee members, delegations, consultants and staff have continued to attend via a remote location while Clerks staff provide operational support either on-site or off-site as the case requires.

Council reviewed and committed to virtual operations in 4 separate intervals. The following chart outlines the report submission dates and the target for the next report on the meeting operations:

Report Date	Target for Operation Change	Report Number
August 2020	December 2020	2020-370
October 2020	April 2021	2020-483
February 2021	September 2021	2021-166
May 2021	January 2022 * With the caveat of return to an in person element as soon as possible.	2021-407

During the course of the virtual operations over 300 (as of September 2021) meetings have been executed involving Council, Committees, Advisory Committees and Task Forces. This also included over 450 attendees comprising of delegates, persons who registered to speak at statutory hearings, persons attending for heritage and committee of adjustment applications, consultants and presenters. The meetings have been further supported by a range of 3 and up to 80 staff members in attendance for each meeting.

The Chair, across the virtual operation timeline, has been both in-person and virtual. During peak case outbreak time periods of the pandemic, no Chairs were in attendance at City Hall. When in-person was permitted, most Chairs did opt to still operate from off-site with efforts undertaken to support this preference by Clerks staff.

Formal Delegations / Appearances before Council

Staff were committed to facilitating the delegation process as smoothly as possible over the virtual experience. This included, roughly, about one hour of support spent for each delegation that was planning to attend. Staff provided an overview/tip sheets, testing, and training where needed as well as answering of questions around the process.

The following represents the delegation and attendees at Public Statutory Hearings experience with comparator representation from 2019 (pre-pandemic):

2021 (Jan – Aug)	2020	2019
102 (50 delegations, 52 members of public)	76 (57 delegations, 19 members of public)	154 (99 delegations, 55 members of public)

As outlined, the formal delegation numbers are comparable in 2021 to pre-pandemic of 2019. A decrease in 2020 could be attributed to fewer meetings were organized in the early stages of the pandemic.

9.1.2 Broadcasting and Viewership

In order to achieve the required open meeting condition within The Municipal Act, virtual meetings included broadcasting on either the City's YouTube channel or Rogers YouTube Channel or both. At the beginning of the virtual experience when Rogers broadcasted, the City's YouTube was not engaged. Rogers typically only broadcasted City Council and the Committee of the Whole meetings. As a result, the majority of meetings are solely on the City's YouTube. In agreement with Rogers staff, as of December 2020, both Rogers and the City's YouTube began broadcasting the meetings. A positive outcome of this change was providing clarity for the viewer in knowing they could find all meetings on the City's YouTube page.

Viewership of the meetings ranges up to 300 views for certain types of meetings and created an opportunity for a range of upward of 8000 views of meetings across 2020. The broadcasting abilities have been a long

standing desire of Council and became a staple element of the current virtual meeting process.

9.1.3 Lessons Learned – Virtual Experience

Displaying of Amendments - Wording

The meetings have been flexible and responsive to increased needs of the viewers, members and staff. The virtual program allows the display functions be leveraged in greater capacity. This has been utilized to clarify amendments and display sections of presentations during debate at numerous meetings and will continue to be utilized going forward.

Chair Location

The Chair being physically present at the meeting, although has not required, does enable for greater “off-air” communication regarding any procedural or technical matters that may arise from time to time. As the hybrid model adds new elements to the meeting process, Staff are of the opinion the Chair should be required to be with the Clerking staff and not participate from off-site.

Staff Involvement – Increased

The Legislative Services branch within the Clerk’s Services Department complete the largest majority of the clerking of meetings which, most often, require two support staff in order to execute. The same Legislative staff members also provide secondary support where there may be another Department taking the clerking role for certain committees. A significant increase in additional hours of the Legislative Team have been necessary for the execution. This is expected to remain, as we navigate the next phase. Further details are contained within section 9.29.

Alongside Clerk’s Services, IT Services have needed to be available for technical assistance for every meeting that is conducted. Prior to virtual operation, only Council and COW meetings were on-site supported by IT Services. Prior to the pandemic, IT staff were providing on-site support for three (3) meetings per month (1 Council and 2 Committee of the Whole) averaging one and a half (1.5) hours per meeting for a total of approximately fifty (50) hours (based on thirty-three (33) meetings) for the year. During the pandemic, IT ramped up its support to provide one (1) hour of support for each virtual meeting, split between thirty (30) minutes

prior to start and thirty (30) minutes after the start of the meeting. In 2021, it is anticipated that IT will be supporting approximately three (3) times the number of meetings compared to pre-pandemic numbers. The support provided was to assist staff, delegations and members of Council with Zoom related issues including connectivity and livestreaming. The increased involvement of staff is expected to continue and potentially rise with the hybrid model.

Training

In the early stages of the virtual journey, staff in Clerk's Services committed a multitude of training for Council Members, Staff, and Task Forces and Committee members to assist in the success of the meeting experience. This training provided valuable process overview, clarified roles during meetings, and allowed for testing of each member technical capabilities. Training will be an important part to the hybrid model launch.

Testing

Each meeting begins with a series of testing both of technical components of a meeting including eScribe, presentations and the Zoom platform and the user components of the meeting. User components include the testing of each delegation or attendee to confirm their camera and sound is operational prior to commencing the meeting. Delegation / Attendees commit upwards of an additional thirty minutes of their time to ensure the meetings commence without technical difficulty. Testing has already begun for the hybrid model and will be a critical component to success.

YouTube Inclusion

Having the videos remain in the library on the City's channel allows those that cannot tune in during the live broadcast the opportunity to review the meeting at a later time. Staff have experienced meetings that may have only a few viewing live that upon later examination have 40 to 50 views logged. This is a value add that was not achievable previously.

Consideration will need to be made regarding maintaining this standard as we return to hybrid meeting operations along with a records retention decision.

9.2 Next Phase Operations - Evaluation

The analysis section is broken into various areas which represent the volume of coordination taken into consideration to formulate a safe and executable return to in-person attendance for Council and its Committees as a hybrid meeting format.

For context of this report, the Brantford experience of a Hybrid meeting will be a new type of in-person meeting operation that also includes virtual (off-site) attendance otherwise known as an Electronic Meeting. The hybrid approach is similar to the in-person meeting with the integration of zoom and broadcasting technology alongside the in-person operations.

Benefits to a Hybrid Model and Continued Electronic Participation

Some of the benefits of permitting for a hybrid or continued electronic participation:

- Improves accessibility for individuals with a disability, illness or injury;
- Provides greater flexibility for individuals with personal or family commitments;
- Removes a barrier of in-person only delegations which may increase citizen engagement opportunities and promote a more equitable participation for citizens;
- Volunteer Committee Members will benefit from increased attendance options where previously they would need to dedicate work or evening time to volunteer on-site;
- May support individuals that are not comfortable speaking in public or crowds;
- Enables remote participation for those not able to travel to City Hall;
- Provides for flexibility in adapting changes during the pandemic recovery.

9.2.1 IT / Technology Considerations

9.2.1.1 Broadcasting of Meetings

As previously highlighted, the broadcasting of all meetings became a staple element of the meeting processes over the virtual operation.

Whether this is maintained, once the Hybrid meeting is launched is a decision that needs to be made.

The following outlines an overview of points of reflection surrounding broadcasting:

1. Mixed Display

Broadcasting the hybrid meeting will result in a mixed display. The in-person meeting space will be broadcast as a single camera feed alongside the multiple individual camera feeds showing virtual members / participants. The in-person camera angle will respond to the active speaker and will not solely focus on all individuals that are present independently. Other virtual participants will be displayed only for their speaking opportunity, again in a mixed display format. Staff will be working on the format as learn more about the technology and its functionalities to ensure the best represented display is presented.

2. Scheduling Conflicts

Virtual broadcasted meetings have resulted in scheduling conflicts for meetings that require streaming to YouTube. YouTube restricts users to a singular streaming of video at one time. In order to ensure transparency of meetings, Staff have successfully coordinated scheduling of one meeting at a time to prevent broadcast conflict. However, currently not all Advisory Committees are operating at their regular schedule in order to mitigate these conflicts and overall due to the resources necessary to support a regular meeting schedule. There is a possible solution to be able to provide for two meetings at one time but a purchase of an encoder is needed in order to execute this operation.

3. Participation of Members and Meeting Sensitivity

Feedback has been received that at the Task Force / Advisory level, there is a desire to not facilitate a broadcasting portion as volunteers/members may be hesitant to speak and participate. Some members of Advisory Committees have chosen not to participate in the virtual and livestreamed meetings due to privacy concerns or due to personal comfort. Some of the more contentious committee types have received appellant complaints of

their information being broadcast to all of the public. This is more prevalent for meetings of appeals committees including the Control of Vicious Dogs Committee and the Property Standards Committee where topics are of a sensitive and personal nature.

4. Meeting Technical Requirements and Staffing Supports

In order to successfully execute the broadcasting of each meeting, additional resources have been deployed from both IT Services and Clerk's Services. Meetings that were previously not supported by either IT or Clerks, now require assistance. This has added to the scheduling conflicts concern and a staff resource concern if the level is to be maintained.

9.2.1.2 Meeting Management Service – eScribe

Staff have purchased one connector and encoder from eScribe Meeting Management Software to begin streaming directly to the City website rather than YouTube. The connector and encoder system was previously purchased with a closed captioning display to meet the requirements of accessibility under the Accessibility of Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). There is an annual cost associated with the closed captioning of streamed videos. Unfortunately, a single connector and encoder system through eScribe also restricts to streaming of one meeting at a time resulting in the same scheduling conflicts of virtual meetings.

In order to be able to schedule and subsequently stream two meetings at a time, the City would need to purchase a second connector and encoder. The one time implementation fee for this is \$5,400 and the annual cost for hosting and closed captioning is \$25,350.

9.2.1.3 Broadcasting Recommendations

As a result of the analysis outlined above, staff recommend the following adjustments:

Broadcasted Live and Maintained on the City's Website / YouTube	City Council Committee of the Whole's Standing Committees – Finance, HR (Open Session only), Social Services
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Recorded but not broadcasted live.	<p>Task Forces, Advisory Committees</p> <p>Meetings could be uploaded to YouTube / Website post meeting with the encoder purchase.</p> <p>** Access would be provided to those that requesting to view the meeting virtually.</p>
Not recorded, broadcasted or uploaded to YouTube / Website	<p>Quasi-Judicial and Hearing type meetings, not including Planning Hearings as part of the Committee of the Whole or Council meetings.</p> <p>** Access would be provided to those that requesting to view the meeting virtually.</p>

9.2.2 Facility Considerations

City Hall – Council Chambers Operation

For the purposes of official meeting operations, only three rooms are planned to be utilized for Council and its Committees within new City Hall (58 Dalhousie). At the time of writing this report, indoor space is limited to 50% capacity or 1,000 people (whichever is less) and other restrictions such as social distancing or when it cannot be achieved adding in plexi-glass partitions. While restrictions to meeting capacity limits as well as a masking requirement are in effect, only Council Chambers will be used and outfitted to meet the applicable requirements except in rare occasions where the Charlie Ward Room may be needed. A floor plan for Council Chambers has been included as Appendix C.

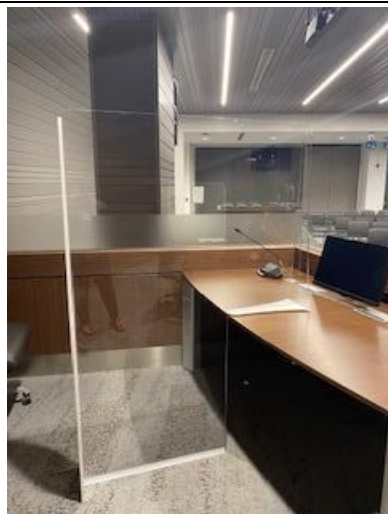
The following outlines the rooms and their capacity levels:

Room	Capacity	50% Capacity	Capacity with 6' Separation	Notes / Comment
Committee Boardroom	21	10	6	<p>Not included in Phase One.</p> <p>Phase Two – Task Forces and Advisory</p>

Charlie Ward Room	26	13	10	Not included in Phase One except for a need for an in-camera discussion during an Open Session Meeting. Phase Two – Task Forces and Advisory, Special City Closed Session,
Council Chambers	101	50	68 *With use of training rooms	Primary Space for all Phases. Capacity increases by 18 if both training rooms are used..

In evaluating the available space, in theory, staff must take the total capacity and subtract staff, delegations, members of Council, media into consideration before welcoming in members of the public (walk in attendees). Attendee levels are planned for roughly 40 (11 Council Members, CAO plus 14 staff, 2 for media and 10 for delegations) before we even begin to facilitate having walk ins. With the training spaces being utilized at the rear of Council Chambers, that permits approximately 30 walk-in attendees to join the space. A registration process will need to be utilized in order to facilitate the additional attendees. After the reserved walk-ins have been accommodated, attendance would be on a first come-first seated basis.

In order to have members of Council remove their masks, which is needed for both audio quality and for lip-reading accessibility purposes, plexi-glass partitions are needed between each seat. Once seated, members as well as the clerking staff and CAO seated at the upper section of Chambers, are to remove their masks. If any member or staff need to move from their chair, a mask is required. The below photo represents a mock of the plexi-glass design being installed in Chambers. Each partition costs \$525, with a total cost of \$6,500, funded from the Building's 2021 operational budget.



Cleaning Processes and Cost Impact

In addition to the plexi-glass installation, a night cleaning porter will need to be scheduled to complete the cleaning requirements needed within the meetings. The cleaning includes each transition of the use of the delegate / speakers table between uses over the course of the meeting, requiring janitorial staff to be present and available for the duration of each meeting.

This will have a budget impact to the janitorial costs of \$25 per hour required.

Alternate Location - Audit

Staff have audited both the Sanderson Centre and the Beckett Centre for operation planning and included those details within previous reports. Staff remain of the opinion that a return to in-person operations within those locations would not provide for a safe or viable return to in-person/hybrid operations without costly operation expenses or limiting access to meetings for staff and the public based on capacity and spacing needs. The broadcasting abilities of the operations, at the above mentioned locations, would be reduced or possibly eliminated based on costs / availability of camera crews and Rogers production staff.

9.2.3 Health and Safety Considerations

Staff within HR, Clerk's Services and Facilities prepared a Covid-19 Safety Plan for Council and its Committees return to in-person attendance and submitted to the Brant County Health Unit (BCHU) for review (Appendix

B). The plan is based on the following general recommendations and will complement the City of Brantford's Safety Plan:

- People must remain home when they are sick.
- Physical distancing for staff and the public.
- Personal hygiene will continue to be a key prevention measure.
- Enhanced cleaning, sanitizing and disinfection will take place in the workplace, and public spaces.
- Frequent handwashing and sanitizing.
- Use of engineering and administrative controls as well as PPE where available and appropriate.

A key piece of the plan is the use of masks, physical distancing and health screening. All attendees, including Staff, Council, cleaning porters and the public must adhere to the safety guidelines to ensure for a safe return of the in-person element of meetings.

The plan received approval on August 31st from BCHU. While the plan was approved, this is contingent upon both the Province and Municipality remaining in Step 3 or moving into the exit plan. Should we see both Provincial and local cases rise and other factors that would contribute to an increased risk for both staff and public safety then the plan may no longer be supported. This is a risk to returning to hybrid operations as if the plan is no longer supported we may need to transition back to only virtual meetings until the approval can be granted once again.

The introduction of the Delta variant has challenged health and safety protocols. The recommended approach presented in this report is cautious, as the Delta variant is highly contagious and could impact our success of delivering the hybrid model.

In previous reports one risk of in-person meetings identified, which include hybrid, is having all of your Executive Leadership in one space. While there is still some level of assumed risk, providing we ensure the prescribed measures are being adhered to as well as the level of vaccine rollout, Health and Safety Representatives have deemed this risk to be low.

The City's Emergency Operation Centre (EOC) endorsed the phased Council and its Committees meeting operation plan on September 22, 2021 with the cautious November 23rd, commencement. .

9.2.4 Electronic / Virtual Meeting Policy Enactment (Appendix A)

In order to ensure the hybrid meeting is facilitated consistently, transparently and safely, staff are recommending an Electronic Meeting Policy be adopted. The drafted Policy, included as Appendix A, provides for the following:

- General guidelines and processes to be followed;
- Notice of participation method to Clerk (48 hours in advance);
- Quorum calculation for voting members (video on);
- Meeting etiquette including for the use of virtual backgrounds where permitted;
- Chair location (on-site);
- Staff attendance (Decision of ELT / CAO);
- Voting and Speaking rights of Members (in-person recognized first followed by virtual);
- Delegate attendance facilitation; and
- Special City Council – Closed Meeting (In-Camera) additional considerations.

It is further anticipated that this Policy will need to be reviewed as the hybrid meeting operation is undertaken. As this process is new and we are navigating new technical operations, there may be additional considerations that need to be included. Clerks staff will be planning to review the Policy, at a minimum, by the 3rd Quarter of 2022.

9.2.5 Procedural By-Law Impacts

Over the course of the pandemic, there were revisions made to the Procedural By-Law in order to support virtual meeting operations. Two important references are as follows:

15.4.1 Meetings - open to public

*Except as otherwise permitted or required by the Municipal Act, 2001, as amended, all Meetings shall be open to the public. Meetings may be conducted by any means, **whether in person or electronic**, provided they meet conditions, including impacts to quorum calculations, required within The Municipal Act, 2001, as amended or other applicable law.*

15.9.6 Recorded Vote - how taken

Where members are participating via teleconference format, the Clerk shall call each name of the member to solicit their vote.

Members participating in-person shall have their votes recorded first, followed by teleconference attendees.

Staff do not feel an amendment to the Procedure By-Law is necessary as staff recommend a stand-alone policy, as described above, that would govern meetings where a virtual element is present. The Policy further explains the rules around participating electronically, including the reference to how speaking order and voting processes are executed.

9.2.6 Meals

Previous to the Covid-19 Pandemic, many meetings included for the provision of meals. The Corporate Council expenses in 2019 for meals were \$14,800. In 2020, and up to current day, only a few occasions of meals being ordered have occurred (2020 expenses = \$1,883, 2021 expenses = \$327 to date). For the remainder of 2021 and 2022, staff recommend no meals to be included in meeting operations. A small budget will be included for 2022 in the event of longer Estimates meetings or back to back scheduled meetings where no meals may be needed. Any meals that are to be ordered would be individually wrapped to ensure sanitary conditions can be upheld. This will result in both a time efficiency (ordering) and operating cost savings of approximately \$10,000 - \$12,000.

The meal provision is planned to be re-evaluated for 2023.

9.2.7 Public Information Centres (PIC) – Where Indoors

Over the course of the pandemic, PIC's have been executed by various Departments within the organization in a virtual only format. PIC's will remain virtual, except for either an outdoor meeting or an exceptional case presents itself, for the foreseeable future. PIC's will plan to return to an in-person format with some off-site/electronic attendee options for members of the public when safe to do so.

9.2.8 Concerns and Risks Associated with Hybrid Model

Pandemic Level Changes

A risk to launching a hybrid meeting format is the need to change operations with little notice. There is not enough data available at the time of drafting this report to determine where things are trending. This is largely due to schools reopening, many businesses going back to in-person work, weather moving more people indoors and the unknown degree of impact from the provincial proof of vaccination policy as well as those implementing COVID-19 vaccination policies for staff. Currently we are seeing modelling reference needing a 25% decline in transmission. A concern is that at the current vaccination rate trending slowly, we will not get there in time (before hospitals above capacity) and further restrictions will be required. While all remain hopeful our hospital admissions may be stabilizing but that could just be temporary for some of the reasons mentioned above.

Indoor occupancy limits and safety restrictions are in-flux and are always an unknown variable impacting success of a return to in-person meeting operations as they may change during the course of the operation or the planning stages.

During a [press briefing on August 24, 2021](#), the CMOH suggested Ontario will likely experience waves of COVID-19 for the next six to eight months that will only stop if the vaccination rate reaches at least 90 per cent. Public Health Ontario has also indicated that 'herd immunity' is no longer possible without vaccinating young children suggesting "The critical threshold for vaccination is now estimated to be at least 90 per cent of the Ontario population, and over 100 per cent of the vaccine-eligible population." At the time of drafting this report, the 78% of persons 12 and older in the province are fully vaccinated and, when accounting for those <12yrs, 68% of all Ontarians are fully vaccinated. Hence, the CMOH does not expect to see a COVID-19 transmission to enter long-term decline until 90 per cent of the population is fully vaccinated, which he expects to occur sometime in spring 2022 (provided COVID-19 vaccines, currently in trials and potentially approved in the months ahead, are available for children).

Vaccine Certificate / Passport and Vaccine Standard

At the time of writing this report, staff are navigating the newly released details of the Vaccine Passport regulations. It is likely that public

attendees will need to produce a valid Vaccine Passport in order to attend in person. This may mean additional staff on-site for screening and verifying of the vaccine status of those attending. Clerks and Facilities will need to work together to adjust the participant requirement and communication necessary for those members of the public attending in-person.

As for the Vaccine Standard requirement, citizen / volunteer committee members would be subject, just as an Employee, to adhere to the City's Vaccine Standard requirement. This is another supporting factor to why staff believe that having the Advisory Committees and Task Forces remain in virtual format is the best course of action at this time. Standard adherence would be necessary for in-person interaction and is not required if the members are solely virtual.

Technology

The hybrid model has an increased reliance on technology. The newly created AV staff person within the IT Services Department will be critical to the success and will be needed to support each of the hybrid meetings being conducted. If all meetings were to turn to hybrid in the first phase, that would result in daily meetings with possible for multiples on the same day, and will quickly deplete resources. Staff, to reduce the risk, have provided for a plan that will have a select type of meeting transition to hybrid as part of the Phase One plan.

Open Meeting Requirements and Capacity

Open meeting requirements of the Municipal Act can be satisfied through continuing to permit electronic meeting participation. The return to in-person or hybrid meetings does run the risk of turning away members of the public due to capacity limitations. For example, a meeting space that can permit 75 attendees safely, after staff and Council have been accounted for, does have the potential to cause a concern if more than the maximum capacity of members of the public show up.

However, capacity limits in facilities pre-date the pandemic and would have seen all meeting facilities adhering to capacity limits set for the space used for the meeting. Where we have a high volume of registrants in-person for a meeting, the Committee Boardroom may need to be deployed as a viewing space or adjust Staff to a virtual room within City Hall.

Length of Meetings (time)

While Staff and participants navigate the hybrid meeting model, the length of meetings may see an increase in the time they occupy. Cleaning protocols between speakers, balancing in-person and virtual speakers, and the testing and setup of the hybrid meeting will impact the length of the meeting time. This is a driving factor associated with staff recommending an initial smaller start to the hybrid model so that we can audit the time impacts and provide for expansion at a later time.

9.2.9 Meeting Schedule and Clerking Supports

The Legislative Services branch within the Clerk's Services Department, complete the largest majority of the meetings and work diligently to ensure access to meetings is provided to members, delegates, and the public all while ensuring meeting deliverables are maintained (i.e. Agendas and Minutes). There are 5 staff associated with meeting operations with only 3 staff having this as their main role. Additional support from the Clerk's Services Administrative Assistant have also been deployed to provide for meeting support to meet the resource need associated with meeting administration.

The following chart outlines the meetings that, at a minimum, occur each month and the approximate clerking resources deployed to each meeting:

Meeting	Clerking Staff Associated
City Council	All Staff
Special City Council (1- 2 / Month)	1 - 2 Staff
Committee of the Whole – Operations and Admin	2 Staff
Committee of the Whole – Community Development	2 Staff
Finance Committee	2 Staff
HR Committee	1 Staff
Social Services Committee	2 Staff
Heritage Committee	2 Staff
Committee of Adjustments	2 Staff

Task Forces / Advisory – 4-8 a month	2 Staff / Meeting
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Early in the virtual operations, staff commented that an increased number of staffing resources would need to be deployed for hybrid operations proposing that the Clerking team would need approximately 2 - 3 additional supports in order to handle the meeting volume and additional work associated (Report 2020-370).

As the hybrid meeting operation unfolds, staff will be monitoring the additional hours of staff and the ability to conduct the meetings being requested. Managing a hybrid meeting is similar to running two meetings simultaneously, with additional operation requirements to ensure the in-person and remote participants can interact with one another and equally participate in the meeting. At present, and expected to continue, the majority of meetings require two staff present to perform clerking functions and meeting functions (i.e. Presentation displays, delegation transitions, and communications to staff within the meeting).

In response to the increased hours and the level of staffing resources available, it is likely that only 4 to 5 Task Force / Advisory meetings can be executed each month. Where possible, Clerks staff will work to facilitate a level of meetings that match the ask to be scheduled but do note that booking of these meetings requires at least 4-5 weeks' notice to schedule and will be harder to execute during the Estimates meeting period.

Scheduling conflict concerns were previously outlined in section 9.2.1.

9.3 Meeting Operation – Phased Options

Given all the information outlined above, staff proposes three options for the next phase of operation.

9.3.1 Hybrid Operation Commencement – Phased Approach – Option One [RECOMMENDED]

The proposed hybrid meeting operation includes three phases. The phased approach, outlined below, is recommended to provide for an executable starting of a hybrid meeting plan.

PHASE	DESCRIPTION
Preliminary Work Phase	Planning, resource procurement, and testing of production equipment. This phase will also include mock meeting training for staff and Council Members and preparation of material for members of the public identifying in-person attendance at a hybrid meeting.
Execution Phase One First hybrid meeting to be November 23 rd City Council.	First phase of Brantford's hybrid operation to include open session meetings of Council, Committee of the Wholes and Standing Committees. Phase one to be maintained while indoor capacity limits are restricted and masking requirements are in place. All Task Forces, Advisory Committees, and Special City Council meetings organized with the potential for an in-camera session will remain virtual.
Execution Phase Two	Second phase to facilitate the expansion of hybrid meeting operations, after indoor capacity limits are increased and/or the ability to execute an expanded model is viable. Prior to commencing Phase Two, an interim report would be provided to Council identifying the Phase Two activation plan.

To outline further, the following would be the schedule for the remainder of 2021 for meetings operated in hybrid format:

November

23rd 6 PM City Council (First Hybrid)

December

7th 2 PM HR Committee (Only if an Open Session Item)

6 PM Committee of the Whole

8th 9 AM Social Services

14th	6 PM Committee of the Whole
15th	430 PM Finance
21st	6 PM City Council

It is the recommendation of staff that with this phased introduction, Special City Council where a possibility of in-camera portion is planned, Task Forces and Advisory Committees remain solely virtual until room restrictions, including the mandating of masks, have been lifted or the parameters have changed that would help facilitate an expansion of the hybrid model. As hybrid model is new, this phased approach would allow for time to learn the new operation, adjust to changing regulations, identify any barriers to a further expansion success and then prepare for the roll out to the remaining meeting types.

9.3.2 Partial Hybrid Approach - Maintain Virtual with Council Members in-person with off-site/electronic participation – Option Two

Another option for Council's consideration could be to have Council Members attend in Chambers, alongside the clerking staff and other senior level staff as desired by the CAO, as the starting point to a meeting operation adjustment. This option would still have the meeting remain virtual in nature as the majority of staff, delegations, presenters and other participants would attend in an electronic format. Council could further direct staff to return in Q1 of 2022 with options for hybrid at that time and the viability of meeting operation changes to include a wider in-person inclusion.

If this is the desire, Clause B of the recommendations should be amended as follows:

THAT staff BE DIRECTED to maintain virtual meeting operations having Council Members for meetings of City Council, Committee of the Whole and Standing Committees only attending in-person with an electronic / off-site participant approach and report back to Council in Q1 of 2022 on possible hybrid meeting options; and

9.3.3 Maintain Virtual Approach – Option Three

The current direction to staff is to maintain virtual until January 2022. An alternative to the hybrid being launched at this time would be to maintain virtual until a time that a return to solely in-person or a time where restrictions are

adjusted where a hybrid operation could be deployed without room limitations or other conditions.

If this is the desire, the meeting method matter should be adjusted to have staff report in Q1 of 2022 along with direction to maintain virtual until Council directs otherwise. Staff would then monitor the ongoing pandemic and provide the report in early 2022 with meeting operating options at that time for Council's consideration and subsequent direction.

If this is the desire, Clause B of the recommendation should be amended as follows:

THAT staff BE DIRECTED to maintain virtual meeting operations until March of 2022 and report to Council in advance of the meeting operation adjustment regarding hybrid or alternative meeting operation approaches; and

10.0 Financial Implications

Meal Suspension Impacts - Savings

The recommended approach is to suspend the ordering of meals as a part of meeting operations for the time being, except for a few minor exceptions. This will produce a savings \$10,000 to \$12,000. The provision will be reevaluated for the 2023 Budget.

Facility Needs Impacts - Expense

At current rates, the additional cost related to the cleaning requirements for meetings will be \$2,000 - \$3,000 per year. The janitorial contract will be reissued for tender later this year so updated pricing will be incorporated into the 2022 budget.

Technology Needs Impacts - Expense

With the adoption of the hybrid approach, we will transition from the current process of streaming directly to YouTube via Zoom to streaming thru eScribe's streaming service and encoder. The most significant benefit of this approach will be leveraging the live closed captioning service (CC) provided by eScribe which ensures that we're fully compliant with the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulations (IASR) made under the AODA, 2005, which requires

recorded media to be closed captioned with all dialogue and important sounds included.

It's important to note, that with the single encoder, we can only live stream one meeting at a time. With the frequency of meetings, it can be challenging to ensure only one meeting is scheduled at a time. To live stream a second meeting at the same time requires a secondary streaming service, CC services and encoder. The costs are detailed below.

Annual Service Fees

Secondary Streaming Service / Encoder	\$12,450
Secondary Closed Captioning Service	\$12,900
Total Annual Service Fees	\$25,350

One-time Implementation Fees

Implementation Fees	\$ 5,400
Total One-time Implementation Fees	\$ 5,400


Staffing Impacts Possible Expense – Unknown at this time

An unknown financial variable, at the time of this report, is the volume of over-time or additional hours that are subject to financial compensation that will be associated with ensuring the meetings are staff resourced to meet the needs of hybrid meetings. Overtime expenses would be contained within the Departments operating budgets and monitored as the meeting operations in hybrid form develop.

11.0 Conclusion

Staff recommend commencing hybrid meeting operations, with adjusted live broadcasting parameters, commencing with the Phase One approach at the November City Council as outlined. The adoption of an Electronic / Virtual Meeting Operation Procedures Policy will provide for transparent and consistent electronic meeting guidelines that can be executed. Phase Two, which will expand the hybrid meeting inclusions, is recommended to be initiated once an interim report is presented to Council in early 2022.

Staff further recommend that the purchase of a second meeting encoder be executed in order to reduce scheduling conflicts which will allow for two meetings being recorded at one time and closed captioning being applied to all meetings that will be maintained on the City's Website or YouTube Chanel.



Heidi de Vries

General Manager, People, Legislated Services and Planning

Prepared by:

Tanya Daniels, City Clerk / Director of Clerk's Services

Attachments (if applicable)

Appendix A: Virtual Meeting Operation Policy

Appendix B: Meeting Operation Health and Safety Plan

Appendix C: Council Chambers – Floor Plan with Covid Health and Safety Considerations Applied

In adopting this report, is a by-law or agreement required? If so, it should be referenced in the recommendation section.

By-law required ☒ yes ☐ no

Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and/or City Clerk ☐ yes ☒ no

Is the necessary by-law or agreement being sent concurrently to Council? ☒ yes ☐ no

APPENDIX A – Virtual Meeting Operations Policy



Policy Manual

Policy Number: CORPORATE – 050

Subject: Electronic / Virtual Meeting Operation Procedures

Policy Statement:

To establish rules and procedures governing the process for participating and conducting Council and its Committees Meetings in electronic format.

Purpose / Objective

The Policy applies to all Council and its Committee meetings, both open and closed sessions, where an element of electronic participation is present which creates a hybrid meeting format. The Policy is created to establish guidelines for electronic participation of meetings in accordance with The Municipal Act.

Policy Statement Details

The City of Brantford's Municipal Code Chapter 15 – Procedure (Procedure By-Law), as amended, still applies to all meetings and must be followed in addition to this Policy. This Policy is intended to work in conjunction with the Procedure By-Law and clarify additional procedures that are deployed in a hybrid meeting operation.

All Council and/or Committee Members that are participating in hybrid meetings have the same rights and responsibilities. Members participating off-site (virtually) shall count towards quorum of members, shall be able to vote, and shall be permitted to participate in any portion of a meeting which is closed to the public.

Attendees, including Delegates and those attending Statutory Public Hearings, that register with the Clerk prior to the meeting, will be permitted to attend through the established conference system.

It is recognized that technology is not perfect and electronic participants may experience technological issues.

Definitions

Clerk	The City Clerk and/or designate.
Conference System	The system chosen by the Clerk for the purposes of joining meeting participants via electronic means.
Delegate	A person or persons attending to address Council or its Committees. This may also include those providing Presentations in accordance with the Procedure By-Law or those attending for Statutory Hearings.
Electronic Meeting	A meeting called and held in full or part via electronic means, including but not limited to audio teleconference, video conference and may include in-person attendance.
Electronic Participation/Participants	Meeting attendance not in-person.
Host Computer	The Staff person and computer that has the scheduled start, stop of the meeting, and can share presentation or other materials as needed.
Hybrid Meeting	A type of in-person meeting operation that also includes virtual (off-site) attendance.
Meeting Management Software	The chosen technology to support meeting facilitation. This may include agenda, minutes and voting processes.
Procedure By-Law	Municipal Code Chapter 15 - Procedure

Related Policy Guidelines

1.0 General

1.1.1 Technology

The Clerk, based on available resources and the advice of the Director of IT Services, shall determine the Conference System method and technology to be used for an Electronic Meeting.

Virtual backgrounds, where permitted, shall be in compliance with the Procedure By-Law and used in limited capacity. The Chair may request the virtual background to be removed if they feel the background is not in compliance or if the use of backgrounds may be the cause of any technical concerns (i.e. bandwidth).

It is the responsibility of those choosing Electronic Participation to ensure there is nothing preventing their participation within the meeting or the internet conductivity required to join the Conference System effectively. Clerks staff will be available a minimum of 15 minutes before the start of the meeting to test technology and assist, where possible in conjunction with IT Services Support Staff, any connection issues that arise.

In the event of a connection or service interruption with a voting member participating electronically in the meeting, the Chair may recess the meeting for up to 15 minutes. After 15 minutes of no connection with the member, the meeting shall resume.

1.1.2 Attendance, including Notice to Clerk

Where Electronic Participation is chosen, notice is required to the Clerk no less than 48 hours' before the meeting in order to facilitate participation, with exception for Delegations or persons attending a Statutory Public Meeting that register in accordance with the Procedure By-Law or attend as a representative at a Hearing. No notice being received, the in-person participation shall be the default.

Once notice is provided for Electronic Participation, a change to in-person cannot be facilitated unless supported by the Clerk.

The Chair of the Electronic Meeting shall, unless for Emergency or extenuating circumstance, attend at a designated meeting space supported by the Clerk.

Attendees on the Conference System shall be reserved to the Members of Council or Committee, as the case may be, Municipal Staff, and registered delegations or

participants of a Statutory Hearing. All those wishing to view the meeting shall do so either by being present in-person or viewing broadcasted meetings on the City's Website or YouTube Channel. Where a meeting is not broadcasted but is open to the public, the Clerk may facilitate an invite to the Conference System.

The Clerk may remove any unauthorized person(s) joining the Conference System.

1.1.3 Quorum – Voting Members

Voting Members shall be required to have their videos on for Electronic Participation in order to count towards quorum. Voting Members, unless for extenuating circumstances approved by the Chair, shall not participate via tele-conference within a Hybrid Meeting.

1.1.4 Meeting Etiquette and Process

The following guidelines apply to Hybrid Meetings:

- All microphones shall remain muted for the duration of the meeting except for the individual speaking
- The Chair shall introduce each agenda item and, upon request, allow for Staff, Delegates, or other attendees to address Council or Committee where appropriate to do so.
- Presentations shall be displayed and controlled by the Host Computer.
- Members wishing to speak, shall utilize the speaking request (i.e. Raise Hand) function within the Conference System.
- Staff, Delegations, and other attendees shall keep their cameras / videos off except when acknowledged by the Chair.
- Electronic Participants are to be mindful that their video will be visible to the public and should review their background, lighting, camera angles and location with this in mind.

1.1.5 Voting and Speaking Rights of Members

Votes will be administered through the Meeting Management Software, where possible, and the results will be displayed by the Host Computer.

Where either the Meeting Management Software is not engaged or the vote is called by a show of hands from the Chair the following guidelines apply when a Hybrid Meeting is being conducted:

- In-person Council and Committee members to be recognized first for speaking, followed by virtual. The Chair will be required to maintain a list and monitor both types of participants;
- The votes of those attending in-person shall be confirmed first followed by Electronic Participants;
- If a Member participating virtually is called for their vote response and no response to indicate their vote is received, the Clerk will mark them absent for the vote.

2.0 Municipal Staff, Including Consultants retained by the City

The Executive Leadership Team (ELT) or the CAO, as appropriate, will make the decision on staff attendance location. Notice shall be provided to the Clerk in advance of the meeting the participation method.

3.0 Delegate Attendance

Delegates will be able to have Electronic Participation by registering with the Clerk in accordance with the Procedure By-Law. Such Electronic Participation shall constitute an appearance before Council or Committee in accordance with the Procedure By-Law. The Clerk will facilitate the Conference System invitation where needed. During the delegation portion, the Chair will invite those registered to address Council and the Clerk shall facilitate the speaking opportunity along with any materials that were submitted in accordance with the Procedure By-Law.

Should the Delegate experience technical disruption, attempts will be made to either facilitate an alternative Electronic Participation. Where the attempts are unsuccessful, the meeting shall continue in absence of the Delegate.

4.0 Special City – Closed Session Meetings

Special City, where the possibility to have a Closed Meeting portion, will include the following guidelines:

- No virtual backgrounds are to be used;
- Those participating virtually are to complete a confidentiality oath. Said oath shall be reviewed and approved by the City Solicitor and the City Clerk. Anyone that does not complete the oath will be removed from the meeting.

Date of Enactment: September 28, 2021	Related by By-law Number/ Staff Report Number: 2021-433
Review Date: Amendment Dates:	Department Responsible for Review: Clerk's Services
Date of Next Review: August, 2022	Applicable Legislation/ Legislative Authority: The Municipal Act Municipal Code Chapter 15 - Procedure